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Record industry polishes its hype to push the 'big sell' in the fall

Although recording is the largest consumer entertainment industry, a full 77 per cent of all albums released do not make a profit.

Record companies have learned to live with this fact and what is known as "marketing" has been the compensating factor in the industry's continued growth.

Marketing entails knowing in advance what is going to meet the public's approval and inventing slogans, slants, techniques and "hypes" to enforce a record's success. Since September througr Christmas is usually the heaviest selling time for discs, record companies usually choose the dry summer months to unveil their exciting new "prdoducts" at annual conventions. This is also an opportunity to boost morale and belief amongst company employees in the areas of merchandisng, sales distribution, promotion and publicity.

This is what happened recently at the CBS (Columbia) International Records convention held in Toronto.

More than 800 record people gathered, 200 of them from branches throughout the world, but most from the head office in New York City.

It was the third time CBS—the largest record label globally and the second largest corporation — had held its convention in a foreign country. It was the largest of all CBS conventions.

Spirit ran high, and CBS employees seemed eager to transcend the drug-embezzlement scandal that tossed its go-getting president Clive Davis out of office two years ago.

ENTHUSED

The convention theme was Family of Music, as voted upon by the employees for a second straight year. They gathered together to get enthused over 60 new albums to be released over the next 90 days. These were revealed during three morning "product presentations", high-pitched mixed-media packages that used 20 film and slide projectors simultaneously in an effort to kindle the employees' interest in the music.

Over the loudspeaker, a leather voice barked out the contention that singer Bruce Springstein is "now perfectly poised to move into the realm of the superstars .... THIS album is going ot do it."

Rock & Pop

by Juan Rodriguez

Some of the room full of record people stood up and broke into applause.

Although superstars are both the backbone and the icing on the cake, companies like to nurture young talent over the course of a few albums. One of the aims of the CBS confab was to take five new artists in the company's stable into the 150,000 to 200,000 copy sales range. That's not enough records to quality fo range. That's not enough records to quality for "gold" status (about 325,000) but by their second or third album with the company they would be golden stars or perhaps platinum superstars (for sales of one million discs), to make up for those who might be falling by the wayside.

Of its young artists, "one of our proudest examples", according to a CBS vice-president, is singer-songwriter Janis Ian, who is uncategorically forecast for superstardom by Dec. 31.

After her success story was rolled out (at the age of 16 she had a semi-hit protest song, Society's Child, but eventually went back to school and now is in the good hands of the Family of Music), the lights went up suddenly, and there she was at the podium.

The petite 24-year-old singer was literally gushing breathless with excitement and appreciation. "I've been on the road since March," she said, "and if only you guys could see the audience response build up as you worked on my album." She also noted that her parents were very impressd by the way she'd been treated. She was given a standing ovation.

Another memorable moment of the product presentations was a short filmed interview with Neil Diamond in the act of creating his next Album.

In the noonday sun, Diamond's eyes were a bulge and in a croaky voice he explained that this was a theme album that "Tells the story of my introduction to songwriting."

He did not forget to mention that he's been hanging out in Bob Dylan's old house at Malibu and that the band's resident genius, Robbie Robertson, was producing his album.

One could sense the conventioneers' whetted appetites.

At nightly supper-shows, new and old artists alike delivered concentrated displays of their wares. Some of the newer talent appeared to strain nervously to recreate the spirit of their recorded performance.

Then there were established stars that the company had lured from rival labels. One of them was Phoebe Snow, whose contract was resolved after a tough company bidding war, only a matter of days before the convention.

After her first number, she took a deep breath and said in relief: "I am happy to be with Columbia," greeted by an outbreak of applause and a voice from the conventioneers: "Sing is a few million, Phoebe."

The climax of the convention came at the end of Paul Simon's performance on the final night when Art Garfunkel joined him for the encore.

It was the first time in four years that Simon & Garfunkel had performed together. Although both have attained "gold" solo albums since their break-up, the glory days of Bridge Over Troubled Waters are long gone, accounting for the hush of nostalgia as the record people listened to the reunited pair's quavering voices.

They, who had sounded so slick and assured on vinyl, groped ineptly for the famous harmonies.

"What you see tonight," Simon said apologetically, "are two pretty rusty voices."

"Sounds alright to us," ventured a voice from a table. They brought them back for two more encores, and Simon and Garfunkel could only look at each other uneasily.

Could this be a signal of their grand return to the space between the grooves?

Mazumdar puts Wilde on stage in Stratford

By DIANNE GEORGE
of The Gazette

STRATFORD — "My Genius is in my life, merely my talent is in my work," Oscar Wilde once said.

There are volumes of things that Oscar Wilde once said that display his with was indeed more a part of his life than of his art.

To illustrate this Montrealer Maxim Mazumdar spent nearly four years researching and compiling material for a one-man show, Oscar Remembered, which deals with the life of Wilde.

The show opens tonight on Stratford's Third Stage and has the honor of booking the longest run on that stage this season.

Mazumdar radiates happiness and confidence about the opportunity to do this show at Stratford. Not simply because it is Stratford, since he has been there before, although at 22 he is the youngest lead performer this summer.

His enthusiasm stems "primarily because I've always loved Wilde, I've loved working on the show and Bill Hutt has been absolutely super to me. I also think I've never worked quite as hard at anything, which is a terrific feeling to take into a show."

William Hutt, artistic director of the Third Stage is the person responsible for bringing the show to Stratford.

He adjudicated at the Quebec Drama Festival last spring. After Mazumdar was awarded first prize, Hutt called to ask if he could direct the show at Stratford.

DELIGHTED

Maxim has been delighted with the direction by Hutt.

"I was quite insistent when I brought the show here that Hutt should direct it. I would never dream of doing the show without very firm direction.

"Bill Hutt directs the show very much as an actor which is important in a one-man show. He has a marvellous way of pruning all the excess away and getting down to the essence of the character.

"Hutt and the stage crew have helped immeasureably to add interesting effects to keep the interest of the audience. After all, it isn't easy for one man to capture an audience for an hour and 40 minutes."

Oscar Remembered is far from being a recitation of the wittier lines of Wilde. In the beginning, four years back, Maxim began with that idea. However, the scheme was dashed when he heard a recording of The Importance of Being Oscar.

OBSERVE

A friend suggested he observe Wilde through the memory of Alfred, Lord Douglas, Wilde's intimate companion.

"Douglas was an excellent idea because Wilde died in 1900 and Douglas had to live 45 years with the stigma of their relationship. That gave him plenty of time to review what the relationship had been."

Maxim has tried desperately to avoid the noteriety and the sensationalsim on which this sort of reminiscence has traditionally placed.

"I feel this is a story that is extremely relevant to our times. When a relationship that has a great deal of love in it goes wrong, no matter what the reasons, it is still tragic.

"Here were two people who had everything that life could offer them and it still didn't work.

"People should be able to look upon this story simply in terms of compassion."

The play examines the entire relationship all the way from their first meeting until Wilde's death.

It is in the mood of a memory play. "The audience never knows if the show is a memory or if it is happening as it happens on stage.

"Douglas was a poet with an incredible temperament. Throughout the evening you never quite know where he is on the line between sanity and insanity. This becomes quite dramatic.

"Although the play is moving, it is also immensely entertaining. Wilde's whole life was brightness and wit and this is interwoven with the sadness and the pain.

"Douglas was the inspiration for much of Wilde's work and Wilde constantly referred to him as the hope for a fresh school of art.

GENIUS, BEAUTY

"There is a great deal of their inspiring one another: Wilde was genius, Douglas was beauty."

After all this work and devotion Mazumdar hopes to take the show on tour. He has already had a tentative offer from Oxford and would like to do the play at universities across North America.

Film Festival due Sept. 13

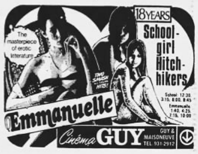
STRATFORD, Ont. — (CP) — The 11th annual Stratford Film Festival opens Sept. 13 with the Canadian premiere of Lamont Johnsen's Visit to a Chief's Son.

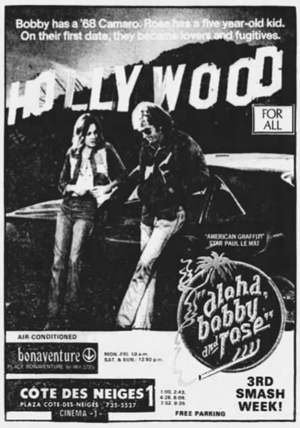
Two series of films will be presented nightly in the week of international movies, including two shown at the Cannes film festival — Australia's Between Wars, and Catsplay, a Hungarian film.

The Day with Canadian Filmmakers, a popular attraction from last season, will be repeated this year, allowing viewers and filmmakers to picnic and talk on the grass.

Three new Canadian movies will be shown during the day: Gilles Carle's Les Malles, Claude Jutra's Pour Le Meilleur Et Pour Le Pire and John Palmer's Me.

Critic-in-residence will be John Russell Taylor, former reviewer for London Times.





Supertramp's view:

They may want a boogie, but they get good music

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

The last time Supertramp, the intense rock quintet from Britain, played here was in April when they were performing only their second show in America.

When they return on Sunday night, at Place des Nations, they'll be giving the final show of their second tour.

Back then, they were one of the most widely heralded groups to come from England in a while, having recorded an opus-like album called Crime of the Century. Now they're performing basically the same show considerably better-oiled, and searching for a follow-up album.

One of the original members of the group (stretching back to 1970, singer-guitarist-pianist-composer Roger Hodgson, sat in a downtown hotel restaurant and commented on the situation:

"We were recording in Los Angeles for three months but we can't use anything. It seems very few American studios have special sensitivity to the highs and lows of our sound — they're more after a middle range sound. Besides, the smog there did affect our performance. By six p.m. we'd be tired."

Hodgson takes honey with his tea and keeps brown bread and mollasses in his hotel room. He's one of a new breed of rock musician who is concerned less with exhibitionalism than with the inner sound of the music. It's been said that Supertramp's music brings out a "listening" audience.

"We still get a few shouts for 'boogie' at the beginning of our show," said Hodgson, "but after the second number they get carried away by the music. They came to boogie but they're satisfied with something else."

"Do you think the crowd will get upset if we don't do an encore?" he asked, referring to their previous local concert, when the group's non-return prompted a round of boos from the audience. Supertramp has made a policy of not giving encores.

The problem is that Montreal fans, mostly French-speaking, are among the most rabid Supertramp devotees in America. The local rock cognoscenti have given approval to other such cosmic rockers (Pink Floyd, Genesis, Gentle Giant) before they gained a wider audience, and the slight frown on Hodgson's forehead suggested concern that Supertramp might lose credibility with this audience were they not to play an encore.

They return to England late next week to start re-recording the already long-awaited next album, and they won't be back here until the end of next winter.

"It took us five months to record Crime of the Century," noted Hodgson, "and this time we've got to do better. It's going to take a while."

Such is the price for creating music with rich cosmic and classical and jazz overtones. Heaviness is always expected and, in this town, an encore as well.

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